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FOOD INFORMATION

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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Subject: Milkweed Floss Collection Program

Field Distribution: War Board Members, AAA Committeemen, Extension Editors and Agronomists, BAE Analysts, OD Marketing Reports Chiefs, SCS, FSA, FCA Regional Information Chiefs.

Suggested Uses: Background information on campaign organization; duplication and distribution to county war boards.

SAVE EVERY MILKWEED AND PICK EVERY POD.

That's the goal in the campaign being organized by War Food Administration to collect 1,500,000 pounds of milkweed floss for the armed forces. A maximum harvest of pods from wild milkweed plants this fall is necessary to meet essential war requirements for floss as a substitute for Java kapok in life jackets, life belts and similar equipment. Every service man and woman sent overseas must have such protective equipment. All of the floss needed to meet war requirements for life jackets must come from wild stands. Milkweed is a common plant of wide distribution but 1 1/2 million pounds of floss is a huge need. Every plant that is allowed to mature increases the potential pod harvest. The Government calls upon every farmer not to destroy milkweed unnecessarily until the pods can be picked.

The program for buying of pods will be handled at Petoskey, Michigan, by the Milkweed Floss Division of War Hemp Industries, Inc., a nonprofit corporation, agents for the War Food Administration. Pickers will be paid 20 cents per bag for picking and drying milkweed pods.

The northwest corner of Michigan's lower peninsula, around Petoskey, has the heaviest known natural stands of milkweed in the United States, but every county in the states from Maine to Virginia and from Texas to Minnesota as well as many counties in other states have some plants.

ALL YOUTH GROUPS SUPPORTING PROGRAM

It is up to the boys and girls of every county to harvest all milkweed pods in their neighborhoods so that not a single life will be lost for lack of buoyant life jackets. It is their opportunity to contribute to the war effort for a most humanitarian purpose.

The appeal to pick milkweed pods is being directed to every area in the country where milkweed grows. All existing channels are being used in an effort to contact every boy and girl in states where there is a possibility of obtaining any quantity of pods. State Superintendents of Public Instruction, State 4-H Club Leaders, Future Farmers of America, and all major youth groups are cooperating in enlisting the aid of the largest possible number of boys and girls. The Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts and Camp Fire Girls have sent information and requests to all

field executives to cooperate in the campaign. In addition, national headquarters of the Boy Scouts is sending material to all scoutmasters. Directors of the Junior Red Cross for the Atlantic, Midwestern and Eastern areas have requested all chapter chairmen to cooperate. The Service Clubs and American legion posts are being asked to support the program.

U.S.D.A. War Boards have been assigned the responsibility for developing and coordinating state and county collection campaigns. This includes obtaining the interest of youth groups in sponsoring collection drives and publicizing the campaign. State Superintendents of Public Instruction will be kept informed on the campaign through their organizational channels, as will all other youth groups.

CAMPAIGN PLAN FOLLOWS TWO PATTERNS

The type of program set up in a state depends upon the degree to which milkweed occurs in collectible quantities. The intensiveness of the campaign within a state will in turn vary by counties. In general, a state plan will follow one of two patterns:

1. Statewide campaigns are being organized in 29 states - Arkansas, Connecticut, Delaware, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Tennessee, Vermont, Virginia, West Virginia and Wisconsin.
2. In all states other than the 29 listed collection campaigns will be confined to localities where there is sufficient milkweed to justify an organized effort. For the most part, campaigns will be initiated locally in areas where milkweed is concentrated. It will be necessary in these states for groups initiating collecting campaigns to deal directly with War Hemp Industries, Inc., at Petoskey, Michigan, to arrange for picking sacks, payment, and for shipping the pods to the processing plant. In these states, as well, it will be desirable for pickers or groups to consult with their County War Board, County Agricultural Agent or the Soil Conservation Service representative.

MILKWEED PROJECT LEADERS NAMED

State milkweed project representatives in each of the 29 states will serve as contact between the processing plant and groups within the state sponsoring collection drives. These individuals will arrange for distribution of bags, payments to collectors, assembly of the filled bags and shipment of the pods to processing plant. U.S.D.A. war boards and other Federal and State agencies will be supplied the names and addresses of the State milkweed project representatives as appointed.

Within these 29 states there will be counties where milkweed is not very abundant. Even in these counties every effort should be made to pick what there is as every single bag is needed and no "minimum number of bags" is being set as a quota to warrant collection.

LOCAL BUYING AGENTS RECEIVE PODS

It is desirable that a single channel be established within a state or county for distribution of bags and for assembling the collected pods. Reports indicate that in many states the schools will serve in that capacity. This does not mean that other groups will be precluded from taking part in the collection campaign, but

rather that a convenient local source will be established for them to arrange for participation. The state milkweed project leaders, through the state superintendent of public instruction, will arrange for a quantity of bags to be sent to each county school superintendent, who will arrange for distribution to schools. Other sponsoring groups, such as 4-H Clubs, Scout Troops, Camp Fire Girls, etc., may obtain bags through the school superintendent. It is expected that in many counties the school superintendent's office will also act as buying agent for bags of pods. Using funds supplied for that purpose, the buying agent will purchase pods collected by schools and other groups. The teacher, scoutmaster, or 4-H club leader will keep a record of the bags of pods picked by each child or person, deliver all of the bags collected by the group to the buying agent and receive payment for the entire amount. The state milkweed project representative will assist the buying agent to arrange storage for the pods until they are shipped to the processing plant.

The pattern described above may be varied as conditions suggest. The County Agricultural Agent, 4-H club leader, Boy Scout executive, American Legion Post or others may be selected by the local people as the agency to take such leadership in the program.

PICK PODS WHEN SEEDS TURN BROWN

Picking begins as soon as the seeds turn brown. This will range from late August in the more southern states to late September in the northern states. State and county war boards will announce the approximate time for picking to begin. Avoid picking too early. The floss from immature pods does not have the desired buoyancy and is worthless for life saving equipment.

It is important that all pods be placed in open-mesh onion bags to insure proper drying. These bags are furnished to pickers without charge and hold about one bushel of pods. The bags should be filled at picking time but not packed. As the pods dry they shrink slightly and the bag develops the appearance of not having been completely filled. It is not necessary or desirable to re-fill bags of air dried pods prior to delivery. This shrinkage is anticipated and acceptable. Properly dried mature pods will yield 20 per cent floss, and two bags of pods will supply sufficient floss for one life jacket.

DRYING IMPORTANT BUT SIMPLE PROCESS

Twenty cents a bag will be paid for air-dried pods. Drying involves hanging the bags of pods on a fence in the open air, the bottom of the bag at least 12 inches from the ground. This should be done immediately or within 24 hours after the pods are picked to avoid spoilage. Rain or snow won't hurt them during the drying period. They will be dry enough to take indoors for storage in two to six weeks, depending upon the weather. Bags of pods should not be taken indoors or stacked until they are dry.

Bags of air dried pods should be held by the individual collector or groups until notification is received of a designated assembly day or period. In all probability this will occur about one month after the end of the picking season so as to permit ample time for complete drying of the crop. This assembly period will be widely announced through the schools and other local organizations.

GREEN PODS PURCHASED ONLY IN MICHIGAN

In Michigan, due to the generally greater abundance of milkweed, two types of program are being offered. The pickers may dry the pods and receive the usual

20 cents per bag or they may deliver freshly picked pods to authorized buying agents who will pay the picker 15 cents per bag and assume the work and responsibility of drying. It must be remembered that the green pod program is offered only in Michigan where the volume of picking is expected to be extremely large. In other states, groups sponsoring collection drives may undertake the drying as a means of raising funds for a group project. Further information concerning this plan may be obtained by consulting the state milkweed project representative. The need is urgent, and even the defeat of Germany or the recapture of the Dutch East Indies will not have the effect of slowing down the milkweed collection drive. After the Japs are driven out of Java it will probably take a year or more to restore normal conditions that would enable us to again obtain a steady supply of kapok from that source.

State and county highway departments have been requested not to mow roadsides in areas where milkweed is prevalent. Allowing the plants to mature need not result in the milkweed spreading, as the pods are picked for their floss before they burst and scatter the seed.

Remember----Two bags of pods means one lifejacket.